

SILENT VOICES

EKPE INYANG



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Ekpe Inyang



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Table of Contents

Foreword.....	vi
Terrible Weather.....	1
Journey's Start.....	1
The Dying Land.....	2
Freedom for All.....	3
Bonus.....	4
Up Korup.....	5
The Moonlit Night.....	6
Oppression.....	7
Greed.....	8
Deceit.....	9
Weep Not.....	10
Moki.....	11
Out of Tune.....	11
The Chronic Gossip.....	12
Winter Air in Glasgow.....	14
Africa, O, Africa.....	14
Cheer Up, Brother.....	16
Franklin.....	17
Cry of the Wood Pecker.....	18
Dramatists and Poets as Rebels.....	19
Anger.....	19
Life-threatening Fever.....	21
Wrapped in Poverty.....	22
The Cave.....	23
Silent Voices.....	23
Swollen with Pride.....	24
Death.....	25
No Budget!!!.....	26
No Pay.....	27
Kill the Devil.....	28
Night.....	28

From Flower to Flower.....	29
The Bees.....	31
Man and Ego.....	32
Vision in Conservation.....	33
Pollution at Work.....	34
Code of Law and Order.....	35
Stay Calm.....	36
If Peace Must Reign.....	38
Budding Talent.....	39
IPE.....	39
Bad Boy.....	42
Lazy Boy.....	43
Flowing Like a Stream.....	44
A Researcher Is.....	45
Cry of Mother Ndian.....	47
What a Strange World!.....	50
Naijar.....	51
Pa Masango.....	52
Sangara.....	53
Searching for Market.....	55
Prey, Now Predator.....	56
Prize for Gallantry.....	57
His True Identity.....	58
Laugh Not at a Fallen Friend.....	58
Guarded By Thirty-two White Warders.....	59
Can't Change History.....	60
Truth.....	60
What Is Man?.....	60
True African Woman.....	61
Mystery Drummers.....	62
Gliding on Turbulent Edge.....	62
Hail Mandela.....	63
Natural Union.....	64
Renko.....	65

Demigodism.....	67
Leader of Valour.....	67
The Dark Hour Before Twilight.....	68
Bakossi Landscape.....	69
Mother Earth.....	71
Debtors of Our Children.....	73
Leaves Me Confused.....	74
Poorly Taught.....	75
Knowledge.....	76
Never Too Old.....	76
Getting into the Ethical.....	77
BB-lambasting as Potent Ism.....	77
The Power of Power.....	78
The River Between.....	79
Shadows of the Distant Past.....	81
River Ohompe.....	83
Baton of Command.....	84
Big Brother Africa 5.....	85
Ogeto.....	87
Okada-man.....	88
Hurdles.....	89
Fatal Heat.....	90
Lameness Is Weakness.....	91
End-Journey Edge.....	93
Double Standards.....	100
Quick to Bless.....	101
For More Blessings.....	101

Foreword

Ekpe Inyang, a well known environmentalist and dramatist, is an emerging voice in the poetic scene in Cameroon. As is the common experience with artists, his immediate environment serves as a reservoir of raw materials for his poems. These materials are blended with a subtle interplay of his culture and tradition, his likes and dislikes, as well as his priorities, which helps in painting a vivid picture of his concept of reality and social fabric.

Art, both in its productive and receptive modes, is a continuous process of self transcendence which Ekpe exhibits in most of his poems. His poetic messages are well encapsulated in a silent articulation of certainties and joys, fears and doubts, as well as anxieties. But not all his poems end in silent tantrums. There are some that are a clarion call for battle, a summon to positive change. This is one of Ekpe's major poetic posturing, an attribute of revolutionary art, the art of indictment of an oppressive status quo and of an incitement to its overthrow.

There is a perennial source of worry in the works of many poets in Cameroon, from which Ekpe has tactfully exonerated himself. This he has achieved through a number of interrelated factors, such as the degree of his originality or stylistic virtuosity, the socio-cultural ambience of his operation, his historical imperatives, his view of the role of art in society and, above all, the nature of his social vision.

Naturally, art thrives on the urge to share and to make known the unknown. This is the major reason why a crisis of communication arises when a poet's frame of reference fails to correspond with that of his audience.

Ekpe's anthology is not merely a 'rememberer' of issues but serves more as a reminder of events that need urgent attention. What he drops as a mere hint to his audience, empowered by a shared experience in a community with a common history, a common culture, and a shared present, can be amplified to unthinkable proportions and reverberate into the next generations. Without these, poetry, for instance, would have fallen short of its essence. Good poetry is that which touches that archetypical chord which throbs down the roots of the audience.

As a poet, Ekpe has employed different styles in his poems, but one style stands out very predominantly, namely that which seeks to inform, educate, and entertain. This corroborates Achebe's famous article "The novelist (artist) as a teacher (1975)". The poet has made use of a litany of literary devices, as a way of conveying his messages. His use of metaphor is very sweeping; he also employs anecdotes, satires, snares, hyperbole, paradox, etc, which he boldly foregrounds either using the captivating hint of Vangoh or the hyperbolic flamboyance of Picasso. Though some of his poems are jargon-riddled and archaism-suffused, such as the use of okokobiokoic, it merely reveals his attempt at extricating himself of the eurocentric exuberance of which many African poets have fallen victim.

Freedom is not only fought under the banner of politics and human rights, as is the mainstream thinking today; the Arts too can fight! Even more vigorously than can be anticipated. Ekpe's work is a sword out of its sheath ready for battle, not to destroy but to rebuild that which has been destroyed.

Otu George Ekpe, November

Terrible Weather

(Adapted from my play, The Hill Barbers)

Thick clouds,
Thick like fumes from burning tyres,
Black like tar,
Descending upon the hills,
Upon the entire landscape.

Journey's Start

(Written 2010)

Remember where we met
Together to begin
Our lifelong journey.

Ahead lay a chain of hills
Flanking us were great cliffs,
Tailing us an ocean wild.

U-turn to swim and drown?
Left or right short-cut turn
To hit the ocean bed?

Onward march to strain and sweat
Together we both chose,
To strain and sweat.

Panting and dripping wet,
The fountain we at last have found;
Weary but happy we also are there.

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The fountain we at last have found;
Weary but happy we also are there.

The Dying Land

(One of my first two poems, written 1992)

The songbird has now raised her voice to warn
Expect no gain in clear material terms
Relentless go you on and fight the fight
For the liberation of the dying land

Summon your courage for the daring try
To get the land from that false mirror's face
A false reflection of her the mirror casts
Her people hold themselves in self-distrust

The land is the known womb of all mankind
Though now she may appear impotent so
But still million and one on her depend
Men and women both from the North and South

But most of them have grown ungrateful tongues
Spitting on the old womb that housed them once
Occupied are they now chopping the tree
Whose fall would mean goodbye to all mankind

Even now they roam about the land
Looking to see the best of all the rams
Have you no eyes to see the ploughs they bear?
I know they've brought you many, many gifts

Forget you not the story of the land
With a few gifts they snatched away yours sons
Whose toil and sweat brought glory to their land
Now poverty's the anthem of your land

Some men do yearn aloud to come back home
Knowing no future have they where they live
They're hunting dogs that eat but clean, dry bones
Their masters' bellies stuffed with chunks of meat

Repeat itself such a story must not
Ensure full protection of your land
Your only hope and future now it is
To sell a piece would mean to pawn your life

Self-distrust stifles that part of you
Where the very sap of life is found
Fear is mine to see the land so full
Of men and women full of self-distrust

Now is dawn for you to see the light
Darkness is dispelled by sun and moon
No more shall they succeed to wrap you up
In that thick, warm blanket of deceit

Freedom for All

(One of my first two poems, written 1992)

Prepared is the way
By Osere of old
For creative minds
To channel their thoughts
In search of wisdom
And freedom for all

Now is the time
That every one –
Man and woman

Some men do yearn aloud to come back home
Knowing no future have they where they live
They're hunting dogs that eat but clean, dry bones
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By Osere of old
For creative minds
To channel their thoughts
In search of wisdom
And freedom for all

Now is the time
That every one –
Man and woman

Boy and girl
Young and old
Rich and poor –
Must stand up erect
For freedom-fight

No time to waste
My country men
Wait not to be told by any one
What should be your duty to perform
To cleanse the land of corruption
And cure our minds
Of mental blindness

Spare the gun
But strengthen your voice
As Osere did
To awaken the minds
That have been so submerged
In the ocean of greed
Destroying ecosystems
To build ego-systems

Bonus

In that thick jungle full of thorns
Did he his utmost
Sweating day and night
Panting like a hunting dog
Struggling to clear the thorny thickets
In obedience to his master's command
And thus bathed in praises
And slept on a carpet of memos

Boy and girl
Young and old
Rich and poor –
Must stand up erect
For freedom-fight

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And thus bathed in praises
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Laced with flowers of commendations
Which led him to think he stood to gain
Baskets on baskets at harvest time
But as the years rolled to a close
And hoes had done their job to exhume
And brought to light
The products of his sweat
A comrade on his left
Whose tongue had the taste of acid
And whose head would never bow to shit-command
Nor would his fingers get soiled with grains of earth
It was he that received three basketfuls of yam
And a giant he-goat
As Christmas bonus
While our sweating man was served
With yet another praise-bearing memo
Which made him blink in disbelief
Thinking his eyes were screened with haze
But it's true, his bonus that was

Up Korup

Up, up! Korup from that long, long slumber
Through a tiny hole peeps the sun to warn
Stirring time it is to a new, bright day
From the forest comes a golden tune of hope
Splendid like a song for a new born child
A tune of the coming of a great event
The birds of the air now sing it with ease
Up, up, up, and pick up the thread
Dedicated is it especially for you
The gods of the land were at first crow astir
Ancestral spirits out in their numbers to see

Laced with flowers of commendations
Which led him to think he stood to gain
Baskets on baskets at harvest time
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The birds of the air now sing it with ease
Up, up, up, and pick up the thread
Dedicated is it especially for you
The gods of the land were at first crow astir
Ancestral spirits out in their numbers to see

So pick up the drums, the rattles and the gongs
And give the tune a great artistic touch
So even the lame may stand up and dance

The Moonlit Night

Three moons had slipped past
Yet children slept at dusk
At dusk came darkness thick
A thing the kids abhorred

Occupied was every mind
In supplication for her smile
For her face to lit the land
And fill each heart with bliss

Then came one quiet evening
As the clouds drifted by
Came happy shouts of children
Jumping from house to house

Parents the message could guess
The golden face had shown
Knew they what else would follow
To mark the glamorous night

Gathered at Village Square
Children in their numbers
One great circle they formed
Like the face in the sky

Sang they songs of war and peace
Songs of toil and joy

So pick up the drums, the rattles and the gongs
And give the tune a great artistic touch
So even the lame may stand up and dance

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Songs of toil and joy

Of death and birth
Songs composed by great poets

Oppression

Just because I stoop not to you for help
But always struggle hard to help myself
You now employ all instruments you can
To ensure that my head is always bowed

Your solace is to see how I can march
With arms stretched out in front to beg for alms
You sure enjoy to see me beg and beg
For you to be certain down there I'm still

It's fun for you to trample on my head
And see me stooping low in front of you
Your dream is to see that no rival nears
Which is why you bear oppressive arms

So that is why you work hard to oppress
Because you fear a rival may o'er-take
And push you far so hard against the rock
So much your position may have a dent

Oppressive intents have poisoned your mind
So much you now forget you need a push
So long have you been perching on that rung
Since no one is with you to fight for space

Competition's the driving force in life
It helps to bring about development
But yet no one who strives hard to succeed

Of death and birth
Songs composed by great poets

Oppression

Just because I stoop not to you for help
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Since no one is with you to fight for space

Competition's the driving force in life
It helps to bring about development
But yet no one who strives hard to succeed

Will ever be a human you will like

Why have you brought yourself so low to hurt
Hurting is but a method of the low
Those low in spirit and in confidence
Who always fear a rival may o'er-take

Weapon of the weak oppression is
Those not sure they can a great chance stand
To gain success alongside those who strive
Hard to make sure the leadt hey also take

Greed

A very long hand yours must be
Ever stretched to grab the best
Nothing good belongs to Anyone
But Greed

Greed sees Someone's pretty wife
And turns around to snatch her 'way
As nobody must marry her
But Greed

Where lives Greed? Up in the sky
Everyone sees him towering there
Where nobody ventures to reach
But Greed

What a mountain of a house
Why so low are all the rest?
Pigmies dwellers here must be
But Greed

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What a mountain of a house
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Pigmies dwellers here must be
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Greed and Everyone sit down
To celebrate Someone's raise
And Everyone takes little food
But Greed

Someone gets promoted
To the rank of No-body
And Everyone is happy
But Greed

Greed is This and That and All
So nobody can have a place
Always nobody's qualified
But Greed

Someone knows Greed's house is filled
With all that belongs to Everyone
Since nobody must have a thing
But Greed

So pack-full is the house of Greed
That one day the walls all collapsed
And nobody has a broken house
But Greed

Deceit

Dry and hard is the earth
After the terrible drought
Everyone cries of dearth
The fields are held in doubt

Greed and Everyone sit down
To celebrate Someone's raise
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Deceit

Dry and hard is the earth
After the terrible drought
Everyone cries of dearth
The fields are held in doubt

Desert sands fill the brooks
Rivers reduced to ponds
All around I see but crooks
Showing off their great pounds

March they with flags held high
Singing they bring their grace
Warns a voice in deep, deep sigh
They bring no change in grades

Right you are, dear Mr. Brain
Their songs are but deceit
Lay they but long pipes to drain
And leave the land deceased

Weep Not

Weep not,
O, children of Africa,
Tremble not with fear;
Think not that like Okonkwo
You have nothing to inherit;

Blessed are you with rich forests
And all sorts of savannas,
All bursting with great riches,
The envy of great nations.

But take care, take care, oh, take care!
These are your only shelter,
Your only reliable bank.
So your duty it is to use your soul
And all your strength and all your might

Desert sands fill the brooks
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Your only reliable bank.
So your duty it is to use your soul
And all your strength and all your might

To save them from great storms.

The forests and savannas
Are the fountain of your life;
They are your gold and only hope,
Indeed, the lungs with which you breathe.

Moki

(In memory of a Pan African 'brother' and colleague)

Moki, Uncle Paddy, you showed off such sound brain,
which made dry Hammatan stand next to moistening rain.
But flushed are the wits and therapeutic humour into deep
drain where not the longest handed crane
can reach out to pick up a single grain

 Your sudden exit
 calls for moment
 of thorough reflection on life

Out of Tune

No!
Stop!
You dance out of tune.
Look around, see the rest;
Get you not their own steps?

But, yes! But, then, I do it right.
Take they but the wrong steps.
And listen, listen, listen to the tune.
All wrong, all wrong!
Of wrong notes is the tune.

To save them from great storms.

The forests and savannas
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And listen, listen, listen to the tune.
All wrong, all wrong!
Of wrong notes is the tune.

Watch out!
Their spears are set on any foe.
Watch out!
Lest they lift their fingers on you
And pick you up like a fry
And cast you into the catacomb.

Not that I fear!
Prepared am I for the worst;
Never shall I dance to the tune
That is made of wrong notes.

Poor tempo, bad music,
Completely out of tune.
To it I say
No!

The Chronic Gossip

Now to me again you come
With tongue sweeter than honey.
Was it not only yesterday
That your venomous tongue did spit
The biliest bile on the floor of my being
In the presence of those who were then
The only friends you had?

You jump about like a grasshopper,
No steady house, no steady friend,
Bearing that smoke-black brush
And that rusted tin of paint
Bought from the vilest angel of Hell
For you to exhibit your unrivalled artistry

Watch out!
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Lest they lift their fingers on you
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You jump about like a grasshopper,
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Bearing that smoke-black brush
And that rusted tin of paint
Bought from the vilest angel of Hell
For you to exhibit your unrivalled artistry

In the “noble” field of gossiping
 Today you paint the picture of Mr. A-
In the presence of B- and C-
Tomorrow that of Mr. B-
While A- and C- watch on and cackle with laughter;
And the day after that of Mr. C-
For A- and B- to pour their scorn on.
O, you most stupid fools!

With the eyes of a bat,
Don’t you see the game he plays on you?

 Dear Gossip,
Your tongue is but poisonous spear
Though your heart’s feebler than a chick’s;
Eaten up is your mind so fast
By the voracious virus of jealousy.
The stream of your being is polluted
With the most lethal chemical ever produced,
Far more toxic than gamaline 40
Which men now use to kill fish for food.

 Upon all your engagements in this noble trade,
What has been your gain, in concrete terms?
Day by day, so deep you stick
In the abyss of frustration and guilt
As you realise, with bilious dismay,
That those whose names are the articles of your trade
Continue to grow as they quietly struggle,
Almost reaching the threshold of their targets.

 Go you prattling like a parrot, babbling,
Bending yourself so low, too low I fear,
And placing your ear on the wet, filthy ground
To pick up the idlest utterances
From the cancerous mouths of your agents;
 And soon you’ll realise as you stoop so low,

Pretending to be the most humble person,
Full of the milk of human kindness,
That your trousers right in the middle split, at your backside,
Exposing your anus to the cold, dry wind.

Day by day if gossip you do not,
A strange storm takes possession of your feeble mind,
Lightning cutting across the nebulous sky of your troubled
senses
For fear you've lost all those who give you strength.

Winter Air in Glasgow

*(A letter to Jim Dunlop, a one time Director of Overseas Students in the
then Jordanhill College in Glasgow, UK;*

first published in Jordanhill International Network Magazine)

With Christmas trees forcing closed their tender buds,
Yet itching to show forth their beautiful flowers,
Flowers that fill the season's air with scents of joy
And remind every living soul, as never before,
Of the kind of love and peace that in Heaven prevail,
And the bountiful acts of receiving and giving and sharing,
Which are the roots that keep us firm in our soil of love,
Not too early on my part I consider it to extend
My sincere wishes of Happy Christmas to you, Jim,
Before the frozen winter air in Glasgow begins to thaw
In the joy and warmth of Christmas carols.

Africa, O, Africa

Africa, O, Africa,
Land where every creature bred
And spread to distant land,

Pretending to be the most humble person,
Full of the milk of human kindness,
That your trousers right in the middle split, at your backside,
Exposing your anus to the cold, dry wind.

Day by day if gossip you do not,
A strange storm takes possession of your feeble mind,
Lightning cutting across the nebulous sky of your troubled
senses
For fear you've lost all those who give you strength.

Winter Air in Glasgow

*(A letter to Jim Dunlop, a one time Director of Overseas Students in the
then Jordanhill College in Glasgow, UK;*

first published in Jordanhill International Network Magazine)

With Christmas trees forcing closed their tender buds,
Yet itching to show forth their beautiful flowers,
Flowers that fill the season's air with scents of joy
And remind every living soul, as never before,
Of the kind of love and peace that in Heaven prevail,
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Africa, O, Africa

Africa, O, Africa,
Land where every creature bred
And spread to distant land,

To make the best use of the earth,
Where hath thou thrown thy power
To bring forth men of confidence?
Africa , O, Africa,
Where every green leaf is still green
And bears the hope for all mankind,
With new discoveries day by day
Of those that can worst maladies cure,
Where hath thou thrown thy power
To bring forth men with healing hands?

Africa, O, Africa,
The head, and trunk, and limbs apart,
The artifacts of Lucifers
In their struggle to reap and rape
And tap the best you had in store
So nothing left can make you grow,
Where hath thou thrown thy power
To invoke the gods and ancestors
To lend their helping hand?

Africa, O, Africa,
The rays of hope still on you shine
Despite the cries and fears
That now make you seem a beggar
On which every nation hungry of fame
Casts her own paltry parcel of alms,
Alms that bring you nothing but shame,
Where hath thou thrown thy power
To bring forth men of industry?

Africa, O, Africa,
Your single leaf can millions fetch
Yet no value on it you place;

For paltry sums you throw it 'way
Or for nothing but meagre alms,
Where hath thou thrown thy power
To make the best of what you have?

Africa, O, Africa,
Where all roads lead to distant land
While local tracks close up each day,
Local markets a heap of waste,
Where hath thou thrown thy power
To start a new Trans-Sahara Trade?

Africa, O, Africa,
Where now great lines do cut across
Keeping the head 'way from the trunk,
The left hand meeting not the right
So that your old clothes you can't mend
But lie thee still and wait for alms,
Where hath thou thrown thy power
To build great empires?

Africa, O, Africa,
O, Africa, O, Africa!
Once the fountain of all hopes,
Now a desert of despair,
Where hath thou thrown thy power,
That Afro-optimism?

Cheer Up, Brother

What is it that bothers you?
It's but a passing pain.
Find you something nice to do

For paltry sums you throw it 'way
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Cheer Up, Brother

What is it that bothers you?
It's but a passing pain.
Find you something nice to do

So you can new strength gain.

Your face has been so clouded,
Gone is your voice so weak,
Which tells your mind is crowded
This lonesome, fateful week.

Cheer up, my dearest brother,
Think less about the pain.
It's not for you to bother;
Take it as a life's gain.

Life is but a rough passage,
Rough to test your courage
And to give you the message
That you face a college.

Franklin

(In memory of a colleague in conservation; read at his burial ground)

You sat there staring at us in the face
Smiling, building vain courage in us

But...
You fooled us
For surely you were ready
To turn your back on us
To embrace that most ugly hangman

Franklin!
Mbo-man!
Ewenzó!
Why did you give in so soon

So you can new strength gain.

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Franklin!
Mbo-man!
Ewenzó!
Why did you give in so soon

To create such painful darkness over us?

Death! Death! Death!

Most dreaded beast!

Still draining the youth of sap?

When will you grow too old

To stand up

And switch off the power of life?

Cry of the Woodpecker

so now you're out to set your axe
on one that makes my nest?

That's not fair, not fair at all,
i've hardly come to yours.

don't you know i too must survive
and have a place to live?

That's not fair, not fair at all,
i too need to live on.

look around, can you count them all,
how many you've annexed?
That's not fair, not fair at all,
you thought i don't need one?

and now even my only one
you want to rob me of?

That's not fair, not fair at all,
i too need to survive.

Now let's all make a sacred place
so we can live in peace;
danger may take us by surprise
if we don't think as one.

To create such painful darkness over us?

Death! Death! Death!

Most dreaded beast!

Still draining the youth of sap?

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That's not fair, not fair at all,
i too need to survive.

Now let's all make a sacred place
so we can live in peace;
danger may take us by surprise
if we don't think as one.

Dramatists and Poets As Rebels

Dramatists, poets
Great visions project
Crystallised
In words charged with emotions
Potent, explosive, corrosive
Aimed at purging
Society's filth
Which but hurt a thousand and one
That on filthy grounds depend to reap
And thus are branded rebels
To be persecuted, castigated, silenced

Anger

(First published in Songs for Tomorrow, edited by Oscar C. Lambang)

Wild bon-fire
Encased in the cage of our being

Raging flames, ranting, roaring
Boiling, bubbling restlessly for revenge
Cracking and consuming with ease

The cage to liberate itself
From the restraining cell
Forcing its way through
To make an exit and batter

With words and blows and clubs
To hack with machetes and swords and axes
To shatter with guns and grenades and bombs
To consume, to reduce to dust

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To hack with machetes and swords and axes
To shatter with guns and grenades and bombs
To consume, to reduce to dust

The target foe

But after the deed is done
And wallow we in pools of blood
Even of innocent souls
Regrets in tons on our heads we feel
Noting extreme the act was, and
No ocean can us wash clean of the mess

Again...

The raging, the ranting, the roaring
The boiling, the bubbling
The forcing its way through
The letting it go

And now the regrets
The impact of the burning
The thick fumes in the sky suffocating the birds
The raping and razing of fire as it spreads

In rage, creating and depositing behind
Mounts of acidic ashes in us
Corroding, consuming, weighing, to eventually
Collapse the walls of our being

Life-threatening Fever

i

Daily in pursuit
Of selfish development
Nations great enough
To play the steward of Mother Earth
Continue employing cheap
Technology to increase
Profit margins
For more affluence

Burning fuels
Containing gaseous grains
Carried by fumes thick and dark
Like tar
Up by winds to form
Above our heads

Thick blanket
Trapping heat to send back
To Mother Earth
Causing her to develop
Very high life-threatening fever

ii

Some gaseous grains
Escaping from our homes
Embark on a journey taking years
To wage a ruthless war with great Ozone

The umbrella of life
Over our Mother Earth
That prevents her and all that on her depend

From being consumed by raging
Flames of bon-fire in space

By reducing them
To weak life-supporting rays
That now grow stronger and wild as
The umbrella above gets perforated
By the warring grains in space

Wrapped in Poverty

(First published in Songs for Tomorrow, edited by Oscar C. Lambang)

so wrapped
are we in poverty
with two-thirds the property
our very genuine legacy
though two-thirds to us belong
our freedom to use they prolong
so ours will an open access be
for pigs to plunge in and eat
mother is slow to beat
though child does play like bee
with no respect for order
always ready to bother
but tolerance one day will die
when all the seas will dry
and every child will learn
for oneness to cry and yearn
no one must stay apart
when pigs so play their part
to sniff and dig and grunt and whine
tapping all that is fine

From being consumed by raging
Flames of bon-fire in space

By reducing them
To weak life-supporting rays
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The Cave

Be brave
Dig into the cave
Fear not, it's no grave
Be scared not by its dark to crave
For naked truth to disenclave

Silent Voices

Lions roar
Dogs bark
Pigs whine
When danger they sense

And decide to announce
Their knowledge of it
And scare and caution
The serpent in action

Pangolins roll themselves into balls
Porcupines spread out their piercing quills
When danger they sense
And decide to act
In self-defense

But Giant Rats retreat into their tunnels
And Snails simply withdraw
Into their dry shells
And decide to speak in silent voices

Silent voices
Are a warning sound

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Into their dry shells
And decide to speak in silent voices

Silent voices
Are a warning sound

Of impending doom,
The lightning that goes
Before the crack of thunder

Swollen with Pride

I see your head swollen with pride
Like one who has not had a ride
Of harsh and sour taste of life
But had no strife to make a stride

You stand out clear to give command
To those you think are not renowned
And have no right to reprimand
Your orders that deserve a frown

You skulk about like an old hawk
Finding the chicks on whom to prey
While Eagle-men sit on and gawk
That you succeed is what they pray

Those Eagle-men are full of gall
They make your head swell so with pride
They programme you to serve them all
And thus no day will they you chide

But don't you see that it is strange
That day by day they send you out
To whip and sack and thus estrange
Yourself from friends bent low by rout

Why not allow those men to strive
Looking around for greener fields

Of impending doom,
The lightning that goes
Before the crack of thunder

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To whip and sack and thus estrange
Yourself from friends bent low by rout

Why not allow those men to strive
Looking around for greener fields

And see if they too can survive
The hamattan and the poor yields

Let not your pride be full of gall
Those men stand not in your own way
Nor do they pray that you may fall
Pride goes before a fall they say

A chance give them to try their luck
Just as you had your own good turn
You move about like a wild buck
Your mind and soul with evil burn

Why do you live to see them die
I've found no one that wish you ill
Though Eagle-men do tell a lie
So that you help them pass a bill

Of course they know you serve them well
You force your men to toil and sweat
But don't you know this rings a bell
Your head with bilious pride does swell

Death

Cries! Lamentations! Mourning!
When your mouth you so open
Wide with fright to suck life out
Of millions by the day

Don't you listen to the cries
From the buds you've robbed
Orphans you have made them

And see if they too can survive
The hamattan and the poor yields

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Wide with fright to suck life out
Of millions by the day

Don't you listen to the cries
From the buds you've robbed
Orphans you have made them

As you cut off their supporting branch

Each day brings one one step near
To the precincts of your den
Cruel den of destruction
Where walls and roofs are of skulls made

Were it that I could predict
And estimate the distance
Between me and your cruel den
I'd have no time to joke

You are there for all to meet
And receive your cruel bite
Which but hurts those left behind
He that's gone feels pain no more

Sympathy have you not
As you hear the cries from the buds
After each of your cruel acts
No space has leniency in your heart

Death, O, death, how cruel of you
My father you stole in the dead of night
My mother you snatched in broad daylight
My dreams are now a ball of haze

No Budget!!!

I find myself in Aqwaya
Sure not for wealth to acquire
Though have I much to inquire
To get the facts I require

As you cut off their supporting branch

Each day brings one one step near
To the precincts of your den
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No Budget!!!

I find myself in Aqwaya
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Though have I much to inquire
To get the facts I require

Before the time will expire
And life will no more respire
But find a place to retire
And drown all that I desire

I find no one who does respect
No one I know is circumspect
Then all I need do is inspect
And get the results I expect

But don't you term it a pretext
For do I come but to pre-test
And put the results in context
So no one can come to contest

All that I can at least suggest
Now that nothing my mind congest
Is that you should no point reject
Nor frown on what they may eject

But guide them to help to project
And do all they can to protect
The leading notes to the crotchet
Though this may have not a budget

No Pay

I woke
I walked
I worked all day
I waited for pay
I found in dismay
I wasted the day

Before the time will expire
And life will no more respire
But find a place to retire
And drown all that I desire

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I found in dismay
I wasted the day

Kill the Devil

Wear you an ignorant face
So you may have ample time
For the drama to unfold
On the stage of human schemes
Get the full picture
So you can read
The mind's craft
From the contours of the face

But at the point the sword is drawn on you
Wait no more for it might be too late
Pick up the gun with a finger on the trigger
And bury the hot lead in the devil's skull

A: No remorse!
He is no devil who kills a devil
Z: Well done. But, Sir,
He is no angel who kills a devil

Night

I learn you are the sea on which the witches sail
You are the silencer of every victim's wail
You are the darkest cloud that veils the evil deed
You are the Night

I learn you are the shield of every evil being
You are the conference hall of every deadly plot
You are the theatre-house of every evil act
You are the Night

I know you also are the great mother of Day
You are the helpful grave of every daily burden

Kill the Devil

Wear you an ignorant face
So you may have ample time
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I know you also are the great mother of Day
You are the helpful grave of every daily burden

You are the Night

Albeit you are the sea on which the witches sail
I know you also are the ocean of great dreams
You are the Night

From Flower to Flower

*(An advice to a promiscuous friend, written and read to him in a car
while on a ride with him)*

A long stay it was in the desert;
Went dry my throat, dry
Like a snail-shell on a rock
Bathed by cold hamattan wind.

One, two, three flowers swayed
Invitation to the evening breeze
And my drooping eyes flickered
In the direction of the oasis.

My dragging steps grew a pace faster,
And the windows of my eyes went agape,
And my heart jumped in expectation
As the flowers I saw dancing in the breeze.

On the first flower landed I with ease;
Then on the second, then
On the third, in quick succession;
But all was nothing, nothing but dryness.

Like Sun-bird in a massive flood of flowers
Charming but tainted and sour,
No good nectar was there for me to drink

You are the Night

Albeit you are the sea on which the witches sail
I know you also are the ocean of great dreams
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Like Sun-bird in a massive flood of flowers
Charming but tainted and sour,
No good nectar was there for me to drink

And quench my scourging thirst.

Plunge I into the arms of fate who bore me
To a land unknown to my kin and kindred,
All in search of a flower with drops of nectar
To wet my throat and restore my dying strength.

Found I a path running down
To a small garden newly grown,
There to sow my seeds, long acquired,
Legume seeds for wanting soils.

Behold a flower with the splendour of gold!
Near where I stood, a hoe in hand,
Poised and ready for the land to till,
Though dry, and hard, and tough to mow.

No invitation did I wait
For the flower to wave;
No one was there for free-movement to prompt,
All was toil and toil and sweat for growth.

My tongue borrowed an eagle's wings
And dashed straight into the nectar-bed
Where, without the strain of search, it found
A clear course of nectar-flow.

The course did I follow with undying zeal,
Though meandering, and rocky and tiresome 'twas,
And found my way to a nectar pool
Where now I swim in unending bliss.

Never again shall my house a desert be;
Never again shall my throat the hamattan scourge;

Never again shall I from flower to flower hop;
In a pool of nectar do I swim.

The Bees

A group of bees set out to search
For hollow trees to make their hives
This was in a distant country
Where nobody had ever been

They found a tree that could contain
No less than a million and one
Hives that could each contain no less
Than a million above the Queens

And all around the tree they found
Flowers beautiful like the Sun
Flowers that contained what they need
Nectar for their honey-factory

Day by day some bees were busy
Building hives to house their great Queens
Collecting nectar and pollens
To feed the Queens and Drones and all

Honour have the Drones to mate with
Queens that have to lay all the eggs
While workers spend their time to work
To feed the Queens and Drones and all

The workers worked without complaint
They worked with joy and love and zeal
But came a time when Queens and Drones

Never again shall I from flower to flower hop;
In a pool of nectar do I swim.

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But came a time when Queens and Drones

Employed some Spiders to build webs

So busy were the workers that
They took no notice of the webs
And each day ten or more did fall
And got entangled in a web

On the whole there were hundred webs
Hundred webs against million hives
Workers were then so threatened that
They drove the Queens and Drones away

The Queens and Drones went on and on
Searching for vacant hollow trees
Their search brought them back where they came
And got entangled in a web

Man and Ego

God made the Earth and gave it life
He made the land to face the sky
The sky that sends forth rain and sun
He made the trees to make the food

He made the sky, he made the seas
To give the blue to the gray Earth
And yet the trees to give the green
And make the food for all life forms

He made the birds that sing all day
And add some melody to life
He made the beasts that roam the Earth
And then Man to be in control

Employed some Spiders to build webs

So busy were the workers that
They took no notice of the webs
And each day ten or more did fall
And got entangled in a web

On the whole there were hundred webs
Hundred webs against million hives
Workers were then so threatened that
They drove the Queens and Drones away

The Queens and Drones went on and on
Searching for vacant hollow trees
Their search brought them back where they came
And got entangled in a web

Man and Ego

God made the Earth and gave it life
He made the land to face the sky
The sky that sends forth rain and sun
He made the trees to make the food

He made the sky, he made the seas
To give the blue to the gray Earth
And yet the trees to give the green
And make the food for all life forms

He made the birds that sing all day
And add some melody to life
He made the beasts that roam the Earth
And then Man to be in control

Man He made in His own image
And gave him power over all
The power to construct has Man
So too has he that to destroy

Man God furnished with intellect
The ability to reason
And be creative just like Him
And bring more glory to His Name

Man now uses his intellect
To bring destruction to the Earth
Why Man chooses to do but this
Is to satisfy his ego

Ego is certainly what rules Man
Ego, ego, ego, ego!
Ego has pushed Man to destroy
Thinking not about the future

Vision in Conservation

(For Bryan Curran)

Dear Bryan,
Permit me to borrow a poet's tongue
Though none be mine
To express my burning passion
At this opportune moment

I feel a potent urge
So mighty I can't wait
But pick up the Hammer
To break the murderous icescape

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Building up between us

The very thought of it congeals
Useful thoughts that come to mind
That freezing mountain of Hell
The dreaded impeder of good intentions
It's time it found its grave

How did it find the base
To assume such ugly height
Hand of the devil
Architect of break-apart
Creator of chilling gulfs

Shame be that devil
The nightmare is over
A Guinness must be shared
To drown the devil in its shame
And renew our vision in conservation

Pollution at Work

*(First published in The Post and then in Songs for Tomorrow,
edited by Oscar C. Lambang)*

Drip! Drip! Drip!
Drums the dingy music
Wow! PAW! Pollution at work
Acid laced in lake of dew
Produced by great heads
Towering baobab trees
Flouting home and yonder storms

PAW music ceaseless: drip, drip, drip!

Building up between us

The very thought of it congeals
Useful thoughts that come to mind
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The dreaded impeder of good intentions
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PAW music ceaseless: drip, drip, drip!

Acid-laden dew
Upon the shrubs
Herbs
Waters and soils
Even as storms oft sweep 'cross to dispel
And baobabs bow in feigned abeyance

But soon again, drip, drip, drip!
Upon fresh shrubs and tender herbs
Soils and waters stressed with load
Give in to acidification
The land faces unknown desiccation
Seeds queue for yonder lands to colonise
Fleeing from stubborn home pollution

March, march, march to greener lands
Cry of drying shrubs and herbs
Obvious growth in craft for seed dispersal
Drip! Drip! Drip! Drip! March! March! March!
Music takes on new crescendo
Afro-seeds in space like swallows high
In westward winds, waving, draining the land dry

Code of Law and Order

In truth thou art the seed
that portends
permanent growth
in every clan.
Thy abode defines
whence tranquillity prevails;
Thou art the thermometer
of respect for human rights

Acid-laden dew
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Herbs
Waters and soils
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by forces charged with
law and order.

Stay Calm

My sons
My daughters
This is Soft West
Not Naughty West
Take your humour rice 'way

Humour rice
In Soft West
Is hazy dream
An empty song
A spice for vain talk

Soft West
And Naughty West
Are twins, yes, twins
But their difference's clear
Naughty West is steel

Soft West
Is biscuit
Some bon-bon
For the new-in-the-art
So shut your mouths
Humour rice
In Soft West
Is distant cry
So don't complain
Just eat the shit

by forces charged with
law and order.

Stay Calm

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So shut your mouths
Humour rice
In Soft West
Is distant cry
So don't complain
Just eat the shit

Take bon-bon and shut your mouths
No!
Take these ropes and hang yourselves
No!
What then do you really want, my head?

Raise your voices
Shout complaints
And find yourselves surrounded by thugs
March to the streets and demonstrate
And get hot lead balls buried in your skulls

Humour rice
In Soft West
Is taboo song
A public march for your rice
Is war against our fatherland
Take to the streets and make your point
And face a spray of hot lead balls
Stay indoors to keep away
And get a punch, a baton and a whip
So take the ropes and hang yourselves

Want to feel the red hot lead? No?
Then I advise you shut your mouths!
Street action's strictly forbidden
No complaints
Just shut your mouths

That was surely not for us
We'll bear some placards, boil in the streets
The blind must read our message clear
The deaf must get the lines verbatim
We'll shout and shout and shout and shout

No, take bon-bon and shut your mouths
No!
Take the ropes and hang yourselves
No!
Then stay calm and shut your mouths! Sh...!

If Peace Must Reign

Preach thee not destitution
If peace the land must see
Promote not prostitution
If healthful life must be

Let there be glowing justice
If peace must have to reign
Let brightly shine good practice
If dust must drown in showery rain

Use your strength to put one down
And two against you will rise
Use your power to make one drown
And more will fight hard for their rights

Let love be ever growing
And everyone satisfied
As justice now glowing
So the land may be beatified

No, take bon-bon and shut your mouths
No!
Take the ropes and hang yourselves
No!
Then stay calm and shut your mouths! Sh...!

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Let love be ever growing
And everyone satisfied
As justice now glowing
So the land may be beatified

Budding Talent

(In praise of my son's, Beya's, first literary venture)

A great product
The craft of a bud
Too tender to believe
Could scribble his name

A rare display of gift
And sure confidence
Pitched at towering heights
Of creative imagination

Such rare gem is
Proof that mighty seeds lie
Beneath the mind-soils
Even of budding talents

IPE

(In memory of my younger brother, Inyang Peter Effiong (IPE) who left this earth in 2005)

A name hailed
From dawn to dusk
At every nook and corner
Where tread your feet.

IPE! IPE! IPE!
Hailing floating
From towering trees
Stooping shrubs
Sprawling herbs
Praising your rare gem

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Sprawling herbs
Praising your rare gem

Displayed at first signs
In cascades

It was such pride to note
My womb-mate
Who saw the earthen light after me
Was poised to make an ascent
To mountaintop reserved for stars,
Where every eye could see
And acknowledge
A rare Korup seed was born.

Twisted went the story soon
To circumvent
Every move you made,
Every step to succeed,
Every effort to defend a people,
A tribe barren like desert
Bogged down you were
By spells from unknown force
Talent-corroding moments,
Twister of great stories.

Started it was like joke
After your mystery swim in River Ikpan,
Where beneath the bed
Into a city you emerged,
Encountering faces
Of men, women and children,
People you knew so well

Though your life they spared at that instant
To beguile their intent to destroy
Plunged you they did into eddy of psychosis
Where, for many years, you swam
In fitful display of tumultuous rage.

This you hid from me;
Stories I got you were
Great disturber of peace,
Rained abuses and insults,
Destroyed property from home to home.
In return received you in scores
Heavy, savage battering on every psychic fit
From the very ones that hailed you IPE,
Pushed by those whose names you revealed
After that underwater experience?

Very likely, that's the fact.
And now you lie still,
Six feet below their feet,
Doing nothing to avenge?
Thought of that
More painful than your exit story!

Bad Boy

(First published in The Post and then in Their Champagne Party Will End, Poems in Honour of Bate Besong, edited by Joyce Ashuntantang and Dibussi Tande)

Obasinjom Warrior

Alias BB

Brave Boy

Bad Boy!?!

Tireless warrior

You intoned the tune

Of reformist chants

And charted the course

For bad boy's march

Against inventors of notes

Completely out of tune

You preached apocalypse

And doom

Spat out venom

As weapons

Blasted ugly craft

To ensure the use

Of good notes

For composing sonnets and anthems

Of progress

How far did you go with the battle?

How near are we to Completion Point?

No answer, Brave Lone Warrior?

You crafted the final crown for your coronation

Plated with scales and spines and quills
Of reformist missiles

And then...
You vanished in four bloody jets
Too swift for my weak brain
To fathom
You're gone

To return
In multiple numbers
And manifold forms
With new craft
To conclude the battle?

Or...
Was that your own kind of stop
To the long, sweaty, tricky
And oft bloody battle?
Bad boy!

Lazy Boy

You sit all day
Fumbling with balls
Making silly calls
Chattering at the bay

You sit all day
Dreaming of the bar
Watching the Star
Staring at the ray

Plated with scales and spines and quills
Of reformist missiles

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Lazy Boy

You sit all day
Fumbling with balls
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Chattering at the bay

You sit all day
Dreaming of the bar
Watching the Star
Staring at the ray

You sit all day
Playing with poles
Poking at the holes
Earning no pay

You sit all day
Eating their food
Dancing on the stool
Ignoring what they say
You sit all day
Admiring boobs
Ignoring books
Making no hay

Flowing Like a Stream

(First published in The Post and then in Their Champagne Party Will End, Poems in Honour of Bate Besong, edited by Joyce Ashuntantang and Dibussi Tande)

Materials
as building blocks
to make
the message crystal-clear
and safe for public consumption
must flow like a stream

Those at the rear
may take their place at centre stage
or rank themselves with leaders high because
it must flow like a stream

You sit all day
Playing with poles
Poking at the holes
Earning no pay

You sit all day
Eating their food
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may take their place at centre stage
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Those at the fore-ranks
may choose
to bring up the rear
Or take their place at centre stage because
it must flow like a stream
Those at the centre
may tail the crowd as hand-clappers
or join the rank of leaders tall because
it must flow like a stream

Centre
rear or front or where
won't name you goat or dog or pig
or whatever
won't bring you frontal headache
Backache
Stomach-ache
toothache
if where you are is insurance that
it will flow like a stream

A Researcher Is

(From my research book, Doing academic research)

A researcher is
trader in reliable products
that inform changes in policy and practice
and fuel our inventive imagination
for guaranteed, sustainable development

A researcher is
honest collector of data
extracting, observing, measuring, questioning

Those at the fore-ranks
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A researcher is
trader in reliable products
that inform changes in policy and practice
and fuel our inventive imagination
for guaranteed, sustainable development

A researcher is
honest collector of data
extracting, observing, measuring, questioning

without the least bias or intention to harm
A researcher is
critical examiner of data
triangulating, cross-validating, cleaning
to ensure their accuracy

A researcher is
laboratory of sophistication
equipped with tools of all sorts to sort
reduce, analyse and manufacture

products that enhance our understanding
of issues, situations, events, phenomena
too complex to comprehend
by any other means

A researcher is
incorruptible judge, characteristically
patient and prudent, taking the time and pain
to gather enough, substantial evidence
on which to draw conclusions

A researcher is
symbol of transparency
impartiality, positive creativity
and determination as insurance that
our environment remains un-degraded, unpolluted
in the face of struggles for growth and development

Cry of Mother Ndian

All skin and bones
I remain
Wrinkled like a childless woman
The relic of an age-long burden
Though still symbol of rare fertility

A stooping figure
Dubbed with mud
Covered in dust
As the seasons dictate
What a picture of
Mother-of-Children

Yet
Still known to exude
Radiance of Nature's beauty
The envy of potent men
Each ready and poised for
Fresh invasion

Though such a treasure
I remain
Scorched and battered by human greed
Ragged like a childless woman
In this sack cloth of rape

Where are my gallant sons
Where are my lieutenants
Come free me from these torrents of insults
And set down my burden

I hear
They call me
Mother Ndian
But forget the law
Never Deny Indigenous Agents Nourishment

Infant to the very aged
Now know I
Am the heart and
Supply life-blood
To our ailing body
I have borne the burden
Taught by my mother
To do so patiently
Since I was a virgin

I have maintained
Flesh supplies
Though face-lessly
To keep our body
From desiccating

Yet
Here I stoop
Scorched
Body covered in dust
Knee-deep in mud
As the seasons dictate

Is it by nature
I must make fresh supplies
To tarmac zones
Looking like this
My constant supplies

Make those zones resonant
With vibrant sounds
Of flashy machines
The pride of every nation

But
Sons
When shall I
Remove this ragged
Sack cloth
When shall I
When shall mine be a new garment too

'Wasn't yesterday
Your fathers, John and Jean, died
Or is this uniform
For dumb suppliers of
The precious liquid of growth

What a Strange World!

(From my first published play, Professor Adoniah)

What a strange world we have today!
The deer aims to jump from tree to tree
Like the mona monkey in search of the ripest fruit.
The monkey itself renounces the forest; it wants to join
The community in the sky to try to fly as swiftly
As the swiftest sparrow. Our generation
Is inextricably trapped in this horrible ambition
For rapid evolution. Our aspiration to build
A kingdom of Midases and Solomons will change
The raindrops that moisten the earth into axes
That will break the floor of life.
The insolation from our bounteous, beautiful sun,
Which gives us both light and life will be turned into
Wrathful flames that will lick up both the living
And the lifeless. See my son, Nelanya. He is already
Worse than the devils first client. Delight is his
To find himself on the skyward glide
While below his feet the floor opens her mouth
To swallow me. Nelanya, Nelanya, I fear for you.
So great is the stride you aim to take that your
Very hip may soon give way. A nestling with such
Great anxiety to fly crushes itself against the roots
Of the tree on which hangs the nest.

Naijar

You are
The only star
That shines on
The ebony surface
Of the massive sea of the dark

Your light never flickers
But remains steady and focused
To show us from the depths

You are
The only wave
That rises high enough to be seen
And ranked with others
As proof of gallant strides

The sands of time
Have seen your footprints
In many, many spheres

You are
The hand
That moulds the clay
The knife that carves the wood
And marvels those in doubt

Timely are your models
To mould sound brains
Equipped with skills
To mend the scars
On Mother Africa
Destroyed you have

Our strong appetite for
Hollywood
By proliferating
Nollywood

As proof of your determination
To ensure more seed germination
You have, like other greats,
Trained and launched spies-in-orbit
To gather rare intelligence

You deserve an applause
Deafening enough
To make the deaf hear

And a gift
Dazzling enough
To make the blind see
We hail thee
Big Brother, Naijar

Pa Masango

Your face is one ugly piece of mask
Your heart an emblem of cruelty
You are callous, capricious, wicked, dreadful, jealous

You spat bitter, corrosive acid
On the crop of my being
In attempt to destroy the seed of my life

Truly, without an iota of doubt
Your species of jealousy

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Your species of jealousy

Is worse than leprosy
The mask you wear has made you blind
Your stony, rumbling stomach has killed the hunger in you
Your constantly cunning mind has rendered your brain lame

Without a second thought
You broke all looking glasses for those who care for nice
looks
And crushed all cooking pots for those who desire food

You schooled and drilled and readied yourself
For the most dreaded and myopic launch of
Wanton destruction

Of all that had no value to you
And now your blindness is gone
Your hunger's returned in leaps and bounds
Now nothing's left
Nothing
Not even for you

Sangara

You are
Colourful like the rainbow
Bright like the morning star
White like the cattle egret
Though con-eaten

You are
Cunning like the tortoise
Brave like the lion
Certain as hunger

Is worse than leprosy
The mask you wear has made you blind
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Though con-eaten

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Brave like the lion
Certain as hunger

Though caprice-laden
You are
Sharp like the razor blade
Swift like the swallow bird
Busy like the honey bee
Though poverty-stricken

Truly
Though destitute and poor
Your hope's strong and sheds light
On sure path
To eternal prosperity

Searching for Market

His wealth is locked in
His scintillating mind
His ticking brain
His dexterous fingers

And thus he is trapped in
Some sticky mire of sporadic
Poverty because no ready markets
Exist for his mind-blowing commodities

Ready to move on he is
Now in search of markets in distant lands
Where eyes can see and conjecture how precious
Are the commodities he fabricates

Ready he is to break free
From outrageous shackles
That have frequently plunged him into
Quagmire of that most
Humiliating and debasing poverty

Prey, Now Predator

Awor, in grip of envy
You forced him into that early eclipse
To you he's crushed, gone;
Now without claws,
Toothless like a snail,
Completely harmless;

But now...
You stir so freely at mid-night,
Woken by terrible fright,
Haunting nightmares
Ugly like the rumour that now spreads
Like wild fire, consuming the entire land.

See you Ewon creeping stealthily
Out of the dark, cold chamber
You forced to accept his 'youthful' tenancy.
Risen, in truth, he is
In search of you he's out

Memories of your cruel deed haunt you badly
Their early flashes knocked open
The chamber door and released your prey, now predator
Equipped with red, rusted teeth and claws

More deadly than a scorpion's sting
Poised and ready for a ghastly revenge
Tooth for tooth, to make you, certain and sure,
A co-tenant of the dark, cold chamber
Six feet below your very cruel feet.

Prize for Gallantry

You stand fearless
To circumvent their greedy entrance
Into open green fields to poach

Fruits meant for all and sundry; but note:
In this city of locusts,
Those deadly predators,
Gallantry is no virtue.

In no time, it's offered
Cruel paintings by artists-in-crime:
Sabotage, mutiny, felony.

Six feet below living feet,
Is built dark, cold chamber,
Sure abode for every gallant mind.

Too terrible, frightful for solo tenancy,
Cold chamber's now developed,
Transformed into huge apartment

Buildings of more than a thousand
Rooms to accommodate
Thousands with proven gallantry.

His True Identity

(First published in Songs for Tomorrow, edited by Oscar C. Lambang)

green snake, green snake
perfectly camouflaged

in tall green grass of bounty
passing for
a harmless worm

crawling around
to aid food digestion

in the stomachs of those
bothered by indigestion
and to feed

birds that fly about
without a crumb to settle on

but now on them he pounces
his fangs secreting venom
betraying his true identity

Laugh Not at a Fallen Friend

As your friend's crown is chopped down in humiliation
To bring him completely down cautious should you be
For yours too may soon be plucked off for more disgrace

Simple truth is his may not fit your crest
And if you venture to bend and pick it to possess
You'll find yourself stooping down for your turn to crash

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Open your mouth to laugh in derision
As he stumbles to a mortifying fall and find yourself
Pulled down by the dreadful force of your laughter

Those that are crest-fallen, pushed into misery
May neither be too low in grade, unskilled
Nor among those wrapped in sabotage and crime

That he is pushed down to degrade his corpus may be
A simple act of jealousy, malice, or fear
Of the mediocre, less skilled, the mean crop

Guarded By Thirty-two White Warders

He has been held prisoner
Since he was eighteen
In that special cell guarded
By thirty-two trained,

Strong, white warders, vigilant
Unblinking, keeping
Watch over him day and night
To keep him secure

Within the strong white-manned fence
To restrain and stop
Him from launching another
Most catastrophic

Wide-impact, far-reaching bomb,
The type that can bring
The force of your being spinning
To an instant halt.

Open your mouth to laugh in derision
As he stumbles to a mortifying fall and find yourself
Pulled down by the dreadful force of your laughter

Those that are crest-fallen, pushed into misery
May neither be too low in grade, unskilled
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Can't Change History

Bruise the skins, mangle the bodies
As you've always done of fearless Irokos
But can't erase their names from memory board

Smear their names with most nauseating paints
Lock them up in stench-laden chambers
But can't change their history of great achievements

Truth

(Adapted from my play, The Hills Barbers)

Truth, truth
Simple, naked thing
The core of the pill
Too bitter to accept

What is Man?

Minus breath and soul
From Giver -of-Life
Mud, mud and mud
Pounds of ammonia
On rods of calcium
Nothing more

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True African Woman

*(For Professor Joyce Ashuntantang, first published
in Songs for Tomorrow, edited by Oscar C. Lambang)*

When the name I first heard
Matched with plans of a great event
In honour of a fallen Iroko Tree

I saw in my mind's eyes
A lady in full display of grey hair
Majestic look, pompous gait
Imperious tone to announce
Her place on the Ivory Tower
Like those we have around

But on the evening of that great event
A celebration of unprecedented magnitude
The crafting yet of a great historical drama
The Immortalisation of the Most Fearless
Obasinjom Warrior

I saw the picture of a true African woman
Beautiful but humble, soft-spoken
Dishing out in unrivalled generosity
Dinner of commendations to a tall Iroko Tree
Under whose canopy the fallen one picked up a ray of light
And grew out of a neighbouring forest rich in the craft

Yes, she did it—dragged heavy Yoruba wood
To Mount Fako foot
Tall, tough but humble-looking wood
To meet indigenous species
And form a huge canopy to pitch
The event at the most deserved height

Yes, she's scored the golden goal
And in her I see a lady with great vision
Ambition, full of force skilfully concealed
In the pouch of a true African woman
Humbly hiding the greyness of her hair
Beneath the dark hair of youth

Mystery Drummers

(Modified from my play, The Hill Barbers)

Caution! Caution!
The mystery drummers,
Drummers that dictate
The tone and pace
Of every human action;
Dance not
To their tricky, hypnotizing tune.

Gliding on Turbulent Edge

Words when
On ears they often fall
Like axes on steel floors

Your breath
Waste not as
Such act may

Cost you a tooth
Or eye as price
Or dozen years in stench

Yes, she's scored the golden goal
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To turn off the tap
It surely pays
Your head to save

Though hard, hold back
The urge to stop
The massive loss impending

No blame is yours under such sky
When mute like wood
You choose to sit and watch

Ship Captain heeding him no voice
Sail on and on and starts
Gliding on turbulent rapid's edge

Hail Mandela

(For Nelson Mandela, first published in The Post)

Mandela all hail
He sought no bail
The muscle of his brain
Used he with strain
Sustained a sprain
Endured the pain
To gain
For none to fail

To turn off the tap
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Natural Union

(In Memory of Mum and Dad)

Said and sealed it was
Right when you both naked danced
And played you still Hide and Seek
In the heat of sun when parents prayed with hoes
For soil to give more grain and bring more gain

Inyang Father really was
The Great River
And Offiong the great Mother
The Moon that casts light
Upon the Great River

Which created that bond
Even when played you
Mother and Father in Hide and Seek
Maintained was the union
And played you your part so well

But as often taken is no notice
Of import of youthful events
Comprehend no one could
Why when up you both grew
The attachment between you also grew

Change the pact thought they could
You to Umoh then to Ojong gave they
Against your wish so they did
But cooperated your womb did not
Opening to both it did refuse

At you rained they clubs meant for snake

Plus acerbic songs by Korup poets
Ranking your womb with desert soil
As means to lure you to their choice
In hopes it worked for family name to clear

But adamant stuck you to your choice
And work it did, for in no time
Gossip sessions on you women did hold
As manifest were signs long expected

Conjecture did Ojong a trick you played
For him to have not a seed by you
And publicly he did swear to Mbungo
Society that signifies Barrenness. Said he
Give birth Offiong will not despite the signs

But on that eventual eventide
When Ekon Ekpe mask did parade
In honour of men newly titled-crowned
Decided Nature to prove him wrong

Nwa-a-a! Nwa-a-a! the cry was clear
Born was a bouncing baby boy
With name on him tagged by the great event
Ekpe the Leopard of Korup was born

Renko

Renko the rock,
The pride of Korup,
The strength of a people long forgotten

Impressive glade you form

Plus acerbic songs by Korup poets
Ranking your womb with desert soil
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Impressive glade you form

From canopy high
In the serene core of the jungle.

There you lie, a molten blanket
In magnificent splendour,
Like clear sky on forest floor

The glair, the lustre,
The glare, the glittering,
Like blinking of stars
In deep dark night.

The dazzling beauty
In the heat of sun,
Hypnotising like the mystery tale

Reverberating past
Reminiscences of hunters
Who, having lost their bearings,
Roamed the jungle

And, wearily emerging
Unto your floor of benevolence,
Were served, as they sat, with
Assorted dishes from the blue
At mention of “hunger”.

Gone now the power is,
Shattered the benevolent heart as, we’re told,
A hunter, greedy like a lion,
Broke all the plates in rage
After a heavy, sumptuous meal,

And now provide you can’t

For hungry ones that miss their way,
And roam the Korup jungle,
And have the luck of meeting you.

Demigodism

Title-chanting loud and clear
Daily heaps of falsehood-praises
Edifices built by the mediocre
Charm-smeared pulpits towering high
Trap-souvenir for godfathers
Recompense for providing with impunity
Wing-cover for mediocrity

Daily rise praise-chanting
With clear intention to raise
Godfathersism to demigodism
And determination to destroy
Dissidents at the slightest glimpse
Suspected to possess the craft and will
To dismantle the mantle of mediocrity

Leader of Valour

You prepared a tremendous fixture
For the tournament, and seem so charismatic
In the show but lack the vigour
That paints a picture
Characteristic
Of our leader of valour.

You bear not a crown

For hungry ones that miss their way,
And roam the Korup jungle,
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Leader of Valour

You prepared a tremendous fixture
For the tournament, and seem so charismatic
In the show but lack the vigour
That paints a picture
Characteristic
Of our leader of valour.

You bear not a crown

Nor display a vision
Nor carry a brain
Where leaves turn not brown
But stay green to our mission
To amass much grain.

Our leader of valour
Is steadfast in our mission
To amass much grain;
Possesses enormous vigour,
Maintains a focused vision
And a wash-less brain.

The Dark Hour Before Twilight

All was set
For the journey to start
At mid-day
For visa to go

But just as it struck
The sky went black
Hopes went blank

Night again it was
Night at mid-day
A starless night
Impenetrably dark

My house boiled and bubbled
At the sudden turn
Of events, but to me it was
The hour before twilight

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My house boiled and bubbled
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Of events, but to me it was
The hour before twilight

And it turned out to be
When at mid-night I woke
My message from abroad to check
On the wonder machine

The message announced
A bright day it still was
Radiant
With sunshine of reassured hope

Bakossi Landscape

There sit you wonderfully dressed
On the stool of Nature's splendour.
Possess you abundantly clearly
Unrivalled gifts of Mother Earth.
Thus gain you the title of Cameroon-microcosm,
The best known AIM (Africa-In-Miniature),
In terms mostly of biodiversity.

Trees, tall, thick and green sway
Incessantly in the evening soothing breeze,
Restraining mad storms destruction-bound,
Skirting and capping and thus protecting Kupe
And Bakossi Mounts from harsh rays from the noon sky,
Holding and releasing in trickles pure sweat of life
That our thirst quench in the scourging heat of day.

Grasses, tall and evergreen,
With dotted stunted trees,
Cover Muanenguba's bounteous breasts,
Nourishing twin Nature-wells atop her clear bald head.
Like giant eyes stare the wells unblinking,

And it turned out to be
When at mid-night I woke
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Nourishing twin Nature-wells atop her clear bald head.
Like giant eyes stare the wells unblinking,

Keeping a keen watch over your entire outline
And distributing freshness for your untainted beauty.

In the lush and bloom of sundry flora,
Fauna, big and small, on you like lice sprawl,
Creatures that floral growth daily uphold,
And thus their abodes they maintain,
Guaranteeing these are with food littered,
Like pollen dust, hence ensuring,
In all certainty, their survival and ours.

Bakossi Landscape,
You truly really are
The pride of Cameroon,
The indelible emblem of Africa,
The jutting living legacy of Mother Earth,
The symbol of conservation,
The enviable heritage for posterity preserved.

The spirit
Of Culture
And Nature
You nurture,
And thus you we must
With undying ember of enthusiasm
Serve to protect and project.

Mother Earth

(Adapted from my play, The Hill Barbers)

There she remains still,
Lying like any good nursing mother.
With her breasts of bounty
Left open for us to feed from freely,
Despite the frequent, painful bites
On the sore nipples.

Her we surely see
More like a giant whale
On our seashore of greed.
A helpless organism,
A free launch for the greedy!

But think we no pain she feels,
When daily from her we siphon
Not only gallons of milk
But barrels of pure blood?
Think we no pain she feels,
When daily from her we scoop out
Not only pounds of flesh
But also peel off hectares of skin?
All for our egos to satisfy!

Well, no cause for alarm,
Were it not that the deep wounds
That on her we've wantonly created
Are given not the least time to heal
Before fresh wounds into her again
We dig and dig and dig.
All this only for our lives to sustain?
No. Surely for our egos to gratify.

For our personal aggrandisement.

Well, true. True, indeed.

Human it is to struggle

For wealth to amass

And rich to become

For power to gain.

But short of expediency it is

To do so to the detriment

Of the health

Of Mother Earth.

But no, continue it cannot forever;

For on her we all depend,

Everyone of us.

On her we crawl like tiny ants

On a mighty ship on sail,

A ship afloat the turbulent sea of space.

Yet on her we daily create

Huge craters of gores

With massive chisels of greed.

So deep now are the holes

She, sooner or later, might sink.

She bleeds, she bleats,

She groans, she moans

In severe pain and agony.

Her heart palpitates and trembles

With fear of impending doom,

Of looming catastrophe,

Of imminent death.

Sick she really is.
Yet on her we daily throw
Loads of pollution of all species.
She sneezes, she wheezes,
She coughs, she's choking.
For time we give her not
To clean up the suffocating mess.
Now she's with high fever struck.

And now, like greedy ants
On an oily frying pan on fire,
We're gradually being trapped
By this unprecedented upsurge of heat.
Heat too frightening, too horrifying,
Too terrifying to permit
Even a moment's tranquil sleep

Debtors of Our Children

(Adapted from my play, The Hill Barbers)

Understand you may not;
But a universal truth it remains
That debtors we have been
Right from that moment
When the first deep breath we took,
As acceptance of our sojourn
On this living ball of dust.

Debtors of our children,
Born and yet unborn;
Debtors of the future
Which from them we borrowed.

Sick she really is.
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The debt today we enjoy,
Often so lavishly,
Wastefully and mindlessly,
Is borrowed capital,
The future
We've taken as revolving loan
From our children,
Born and yet unborn.

To them the future really belongs,
Our debt to them,
Which we all must pay back
In the selfsame value
As we borrowed it, or higher.

Started, though, have we
The debt to pay.
By the care and tending
Our children already born we give.
But a tiny bit of the debt
That really is,
And the part remaining
Heavier and heavier on us grows,
As deeper and deeper
Into the capital we devour.

Leaves Me Confused

I spent one week looking for a clue,
And looked up to her for a cue.

I thought the magic word she knew,
For this was something that was new.

The debt today we enjoy,
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Leaves Me Confused

I spent one week looking for a clue,
And looked up to her for a cue.

I thought the magic word she knew,
For this was something that was new.

Everyone told me only Miss Wright
Would give me a word that was right.

Strangely, Wright named a man with hair in dye,
Saying a word from him would make you live or die.

Confused, I thought something was wrong,
For this clue places me on such a hot rung.

Poorly Taught

(For the children and teachers of Africa)

Our children are poorly taught because
Their teachers are poorly paid
These teachers are poorly paid because
We implement poor policies
We implement poor policies because
We divert attention away from those that merit reward
We divert attention away from those that merit reward
because
We are jealous and have become selfish
We are jealous and have become selfish because
We don't see the need to fight for the common good
We don't see the need to fight for the common good because
Our jealousy has developed into blind hatred
Our jealousy has developed into blind hatred because
We sense competition even where there isn't any
We sense competition even where there isn't any because
We fear to lose our positions
We fear to lose our positions because
We lack genuine competence
We lack genuine competence because

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We cheated to get what we cannot really handle
We cheated to get what we cannot really handle because
We were poorly taught by our teachers

Knowledge

You are such an elusive
And fragmented a resource
We cannot solid claim on you lay
In any single region

You we often celebrate
In our tropical region
Teeming with idiotic crowds
Of hand-clappers and praise-singers

Undue fame we desire to attract
And thus the grains that build up daily
For quality content and form you to gain
Frozen solid blocks soon become

Indeed heavy icescapes
In our polar region
Where both content and form they lose
In this core of self-centred pride

Never Too Old

You are too old,
I'm often told,
And your hands so cold,
Your face-skin fold on fold

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Never Too Old

You are too old,
I'm often told,
And your hands so cold,
Your face-skin fold on fold

On yet another fold,
To tell you're really old,
Though not yet cold,
As your heart's still bold
And dressed in gold
Which, though so cold,
Is never too old.

Getting into the Ethical

To get into the ethical
Life might go hypothetical
With some tint of the musical
Or even of the lyrical
And certainly the theatrical

But yet not so hysterical
Nor grossly hypocritical
Let alone so political
To make it wholly clinical
And get into the ethical

BB-lambasting as Potent Ism

(In memory of BB, the Obasijom Warrior)

When racial arrows reincarnate
Strew our noble sky spitting
Bilious profanities on our afro-psyche
Adrenalin-secreting BB-lambasting feats
Apocalyptically defines our potent Ism

'Cos the Dictionary engraved as it is

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And dressed in gold
Which, though so cold,
Is never too old.

Getting into the Ethical

To get into the ethical
Life might go hypothetical
With some tint of the musical
Or even of the lyrical
And certainly the theatrical

But yet not so hysterical
Nor grossly hypocritical
Let alone so political
To make it wholly clinical
And get into the ethical

BB-lambasting as Potent Ism

(In memory of BB, the Obasijom Warrior)

When racial arrows reincarnate
Strew our noble sky spitting
Bilious profanities on our afro-psyche
Adrenalin-secreting BB-lambasting feats
Apocalyptically defines our potent Ism

'Cos the Dictionary engraved as it is

On the calabar-chalk of exotic edifice
Indubitably not the handicraft
Of ebony-technocrats to accommodate
Bullets designed to help afro-sapiens
Knock with utmost gratification
Such okokobiokoic eagles
Off their primordial pinnacle of
Sadistic pilfering and grunge

The Power of Power

All hail Power
Avalanche of snow
Litter of classy ribbons
Outpourings of eulogies
Oceans of glory

Power, Power
Great elevator
Catapulted Awor you did so sure
To greater heights,
Unimagined skies, mounts of fame

All hail Power
Frame of steel
Strong and tough
Unbending, unyielding
Bronze of resistance

Power, Power
Dreaming no rust
Swelling Awor's head
Crowning it with hat

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Power, Power
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Crowning it with hat

Laced with callousness

All hail Power
Blinding Awor's eyes
Blocking his ears
With wool of carelessness

Power, Power
Fruit tree of bigots
Chauvinists, fomenting
No-food-for-shrubs

All hail Power
The great teacher
Schooling those getting drunk
Carefree and heartless

Power, Power
The kinder side of you
Awor you assured fixed grandeur
Whom now you serve dish of doom

The River Between

She reclines majestically, legs crossed,
Atop her twin ridges
Luxuriant with flora,
Gazing down intermittently,
Admiring the metallic flashes,
The electric waves of the hoes falling
Deep down the rich valley below.

Men bearing long sturdy hoes

Laced with callousness

All hail Power
Blinding Awor's eyes
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Gazing down intermittently,
Admiring the metallic flashes,
The electric waves of the hoes falling
Deep down the rich valley below.

Men bearing long sturdy hoes

Queue up for daily toils,
Panting, sweating as they plough
But happily thereafter bearing,
In surging waves,
Loads of tributes to her Majesty
Atop the giant ridges.

Prettier and mightier
And more popular ever
She grows steadily by the day,
Amassing wealth ,
Gaining health and more breath
As the bounty flourishes,
Achieving swelling tributes.

The toiling men must pay dearly
For their irresistible taste for the treasure,
The River Between the ridges above,
To quench their thirst sending her Majesty
Quivering with exhilaration
As she reaps such heavy tributes
Basking under a blustery shade tree.

Shadows of the Distant Past

(Written 10 June 2010)

I smell today
Blood from
Healing gores
Stark reminders of
Painful bullet-wounds

I see today
Lurking in the dark
Shadows of the distant past
Reminiscent of
Rivers of blood

I sense today
Another yesterday
Brutal rape of
Innocent souls
Leaving indelible scars

Dreams forewarn
Words foretell
And when trained
Minds these aptly interpret
Ugly sights bold hearts forestall

I dream of soldiers
On mountaintops
Threatening to blast
Our plains and fields
Crush the inhabitants to dust

Time we packed bag and baggage
Flee the mountains and plains
Quit gold mines that now seem so much of rust
Sail the sea turbulent as it may
To motherland for some peaceful respite

I hear of threats from neighbouring shores
Told behind closed heavy metal doors
Related by men who paint forms so clear
That seem not to be
Shadows of the distant past

River Ohompe

(Composed by The Conservation Club of GHS Nguti, 5th February 2000 under the close coordination and supervision of Ekepe Inyang)

Oh! River Ohompe
Your importance is so clear
You are our main source of water
For us to quench our thirst
The supplier of good fish as protein
For your poor, hungry children

In the hot tropical sun
You are our only saviour
We come to you for a cool, fresh bath
After a hard day's work
Oh, your importance is so clear!
So clear! So clear!

But we are ashamed to say
How everyday we pay you back
In funny, silly ways
We squat and *shit* right in your mouth
And throw dirt in your bed
Right in your bed!

We drain our toilets into you
We really poison you!
Ah! the recent Gamalin incident
That was certainly worse!
We killed the fish, both big and small
Gamalin won't spare one

Oh! River Ohompe
Your importance is so clear

But now something has gone wrong!
Something is certainly wrong!
No more fish to feed your children
No good water to quench their thirst

Diarrhea, typhoid, *come-no-go*
So common these days!
Mother Ohompe, how we poison you
Everyday! Yes, poison you
And now receive our own dose
Diarrhea, Typhoid, *come-no-go*

Baton of Command

You received with alacrity
The baton of command,
Baton you've refused to confess is
Too big and heavy for your tiny hands.

How fast and shamelessly you wore
The crown you stole with blind impunity,
Crown you knew not was too large and full of thorns,
Crown meant not for your tender, little head.

You obviously thought
It was going to be such
Open-and-shut affair to pick up
The heavy baton against your mentor.

How ready you were to crush his head,
Head from which you siphoned or stole
Loads of knowledge which makes yours so swell
As to contrive to pick up a baton against him.

But now something has gone wrong!
Something is certainly wrong!
No more fish to feed your children
No good water to quench their thirst

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How ready you were to crush his head,
Head from which you siphoned or stole
Loads of knowledge which makes yours so swell
As to contrive to pick up a baton against him.

Oh most stupid idiot,
How soon and easily you forget
A feeble brain you have for such intrigue
To play against the mentor you revere!

You are known to have played dirty games before
As you groped your way through a path so uncertain,
Like the laying of eggs in a house that wasn't yours,
House which you finally shamelessly annexed.

You surely have forgotten the consequences;
But never be deceived they've evaporated.
No, they await you still for such sacrilegious acts,
Even as you seem so comfortable in the stolen house.

And now again you've so cunningly contrived,
Receiving the baton against your mentor,
Dressing yourself so shamelessly in royal robes,
Robes too large for your diminutive stature.

Big Brother Africa 5

Such a long time it might take
For you to comprehend
The true meaning of life

Then you watched Big Brother Africa 5
And it dawned on you
It's nothing short of a game

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The partying, the manifold interactions
The blind exploration for familiarisation
With queer and alien Housemates

Then the divisions and emergence of cliques
The development of schemes, the conspiracies
To subjugate and oust tough rivals

The flattery, the hypocrisy, the backstabbing
The provocations, the exposures to disfavour
The vindictive determination to be always on top

The suspicion and the lack of proof
The short-sightedness and destruction, the rebuilding
The blind and myopic trust in adept players

Then the nominations and eventual evictions, like death
And then the open, steady flow of crocodile tears
And intermittent surreptitious laughter after

Then the Barn-House erected, like World-of-the-Dead
Where evicted Housemates, now Barn-mates, like Ancestors
Watch over Big-Brother-House, or World-of-the-Living

The game proceeds in leaps-and-bounds
Ancestors now twice as wise and still part of the game
Throw vengeful arrows at Big-Brother-House

Utter confusion in House, as Barn-mates remain in game
Hear unknowing Housemate: Who, how many shot at me?
Or are my clique mates so deceitful? What a shame!

Then consider the meeting in Barn-house
Of Housemates whose evictions you caused
The panic, the shock, the terror, the horror, then the remorse

Facing those you forced to World-of-the-Dead
Is bomb on your psyche, on your total being
Making you feel hell were much better place

Lessons are learnt with passage of time
There's realisation of the true meaning of life
Then regrets, reformation, forgiveness, reconciliation

Big up, Big Brother Africa, big up!
You've built for Africa grand medium for learning
Reduce hatred, promote genuine love and peace, prevent war!

Ogeto

(Dedicated to Ogeto Richard of Asumbi Teacher Training College, Kenya, in recognition of his intellectually charged and therapeutic humour displayed during a workshop held in Kampala, Uganda, written 15 September 2010)

Just a simple seed,
One, not two,
Simple and tiny
Numbs that kind of pain.

You baked in the sun,
Got drenched by the rain
From Kilimanjaro to Kalahari,
Looking for the seed.

Then consider the meeting in Barn-house
Of Housemates whose evictions you caused
The panic, the shock, the terror, the horror, then the remorse

Facing those you forced to World-of-the-Dead
Is bomb on your psyche, on your total being
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You baked in the sun,
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Looking for the seed.

A nameless seed,
Apparently great in size
To kill the great pain
Long born in silence.

It's such a simple seed;
This door to that it's blown,
Tossed by the wind,
Receiving no notice.

A seed that tiny
Can't kill the pain
That so stabs the heart
You think the end had come.

You wandered far and wide,
Kilimanjaro to Kalahari, Atlantic to Pacific,
And learnt *Ogeto* seed
Numbs the kind of pain you have.

Okada-man

Okada-man,
Bend-skin,
Take me slowly
We shall be there.

Stop snake-riding,
Look ahead;
Take me slowly,
We shall be home.

Don't forget

A nameless seed,
Apparently great in size
To kill the great pain
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It's such a simple seed;
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Okada-man,
Bend-skin,
Take me slowly
We shall be there.

Stop snake-riding,
Look ahead;
Take me slowly,
We shall be home.

Don't forget

I am my chassis;
My soft body
Needs some respect.

Okada-man,
Stop rush-riding;
Take me slowly,
I need my life.

I need a breeze,
And not a bruise;
Take me slowly
We shall arrive.

Hurdles

 This earth,
So full of hurdles,
So too many
 It's hard to realise
One's life's dreams
In calculated time.

 For these earthly hurdles
To surmount,
O' Lord, may you consider
Recreating the Universe.

 Reconstruct Mother Earth,
O' Lord of Lords,
Man her with winged humans,
Like angels on high,
Creatures that disobey
Laws favouring retarding powers.

 Create a new Universe,

I am my chassis;
My soft body
Needs some respect.

Okada-man,
Stop rush-riding;
Take me slowly,
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I need a breeze,
And not a bruise;
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 Create a new Universe,

O' Lord of Host,
A new Earth where hurdles
Are no hurdles,
To put to utter shame
Man's restraining forces.
Give me total freedom,
O' Lord,
Reconstruct me with wings,
Empower me to flout
Hurdles planted in my way
Man's architecture to slow,
Block the march to my dreams.

Fatal Heat

(Lamentation of the Oppressor, written 29 October 2010)

Long tortured
In my silent oppression,
They've turned the heater on;
My face profusely sweats.

Their hearts melt my steel,
My head reels and spins;
Their cowardice's fading away,
Courage usurping in mounts.

They've put away
Their garment of tolerance
And put on
Their amour of fury;

They've extinguished
Their craving for peace

O' Lord of Host,
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They've put away
Their garment of tolerance
And put on
Their amour of fury;

They've extinguished
Their craving for peace

And ignited
Their passion for war.

Hearts boiled to breaking-point,
Now emit red-hot magma,
Signalling climate change;
My face lies in profuse sweat.

My call for dialogue is ignored,
Reconciliation erased from their diction,
Retaliation boldly printed on the wall:
Such fatal heat directed at me.

Lameness Is Weakness

(Flattery for the Power-drunk, written 30 October 2010)

Stand, face and crush the lame in the battlefield
Nothing he is but weakness and lifelessness
Hold thee the retreats, the clear display of cowardice halt thee

Face him head-on, his lameness is absolute weakness
legs, being so weak, signify, in absolute terms, lifelessness
And consider thee not his sturdy arms, nor his sharp, witty
brain

Oh, now, ha, ha, ha, thy incessant barking and battering
Have life and strength given to his feeble, lifeless legs
Now that erect he stands, face thee the lion in his lameness

The bubbling pain has to his lameness given strength
Both doubled and redoubled with thy barking and battering
Now, in his lameness, unleashes he on thee aching blows

And ignited
Their passion for war.

Hearts boiled to breaking-point,
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Both doubled and redoubled with thy barking and battering
Now, in his lameness, unleashes he on thee aching blows

Retreat thee not, display thee not such unrivalled cowardice
Head-on, face him, face him thee in the battlefield
He is of nothing but weakness and lifelessness built

End Journey Edge

(Written 31 October 2010)

Eni, my better-half,
had left for Yaounde
for more learning or knowledge harvesting
in effort to ensure future family prosperity.
IPE, the womb-mate after me,
had left for Calabar
for the selfsame reason.

My wallet completely drained,
I was left in Nguti,
with my son, Beya, then in nursery school,
and others old enough to take care of him;
I was left behind to carry on with conservation work,
a lone senior staff in station.
Charged was I for an age-long bitter conflict
to address single-handedly;
Ntale, a key and influential community,
was pitted against WCS
(Wildlife Conservation Society).

Daily were Ntale farms ravaged by elephants,
animals WCS was mandated to conserve;
and as community development was hardly considered,
since conservation was the only mandate,
this provoked bitter community resentment.
Ntale's anger seemed justified;
the people saw the project as meaningless
or deceitful being without any development promise; and
no WCS staff could make fieldtrips to the area,
as the hostility of Ntale spread to yonder communities.

Charged was I to quench
the burning fire,
to put the wheel of collaboration back on its rail;
and on 17 March 1997, the day after a nightmare
in which I was trapped on a mount
by a multitude of enemy soldiers, like soldier ants
advancing from its foot, I set out for the mission
on a motorbike, as the only car left was set aside
for research camp building assignment by foreign contractor.

That day I spent an unusual amount of time
exchanging extended greetings
with friends, acquaintances,
and my father-in-law who's now gone to rest.
I was to pick up a girl of Ntale, as safe point of entry,
but I left alone, for she had so much in Nguti to do
I could not afford to wait any longer.

Crash helmet on, I went riding, dilly-dallying, to Ntale,
stopping here and there in villages along the way to greet
even those I did not know but merely felt
could supply intelligence on the bitter matter at hand.
Somewhere along the earth road I met a troop
of smallish, hairy black animals, mongooses, racing cross
the deserted road in such a long line I had to stop
in admiration or submission, I cannot tell.

The last mongoose seemed to cast
a premonitory look as it paused, gazed at me
and then scurried off. To this I paid no attention
(I made no meaning out of it all), and rode off
in more moderate speed than before, contemplating.
Then at a certain hill I had this strong, strange feeling
something terrible would certainly come to pass;

and I sounded my like-horn in repeated blasts to warn.
But alas, emerging from the sloppy bend
was a car wobbling to my own side of the road,
why, I thought. The answer became clear
when I woke up from what must have been
a sudden, momentary trance
and felt my left arm lifeless,
feeble, weak—broken it was, broken!

Scared, but plucking up manly courage, I supported
my left arm with the right, and accosted the car driver:
“Why did you do this, why? Were you sleeping
on the steering, or something? Didn’t you hear
the horn-sound?” Frightened, the driver gave no response
but he lamented in obvious fright as he’s observed
the matriculation number on the bike: “Foreign Project bike?
I am finished! Finished, finished!”

“No”, I said , “I will defend you provided
you take me to St. John of God at once.”
I had sensed he could, out of fear that he faced the law,
abandon me to bleed to death in that desolate forest part.
In hospital I stayed in bed for three boring, long days
and two frightful, long nights,
my lifeless arm supported with tiny sticks,
awaiting my entrance into the surgeon’s den.

The day before that day, my landlord’s wife came
advising I left for traditional treatment,
to flee the frightful impending ordeal,
to avoid the surgeon’s pitiless knives.
In truth, I did not know it would be a surgical operation,
believing it was only a simple fracture;
and I stayed on, encouraged by the surgeon

who was so close a family friend.

Instruction that day was that my stomach
must see no grain of food,
nor a drop of water to wet my drying throat.
Then came invitation to the surgeon's den,
and I walked helplessly, led by my mother in-law,
into the waiting room, fighting the fright
that so badly gripped my heart.

A white Reverend Sister in a white outfit came in,
with look of pity on her face, apparently
to console me as I was then laid on a stretcher,
awaiting the frightful journey into the den.
At a moment I closed my eyes so tight
and plunged into supplication, committing myself,
faithfully, to 'The One That Is Supreme,
whose name I feared to utter at that instant.

When finally my eyes I opened
I realised I was already in the den;
and, in utter dismay, I found myself surrounded
by people I knew and those I did not know.
In just a flash my eyes caught my surgeon friend
in a green outfit, apparently signalling instructions.
And the very next moment I found myself
flanked by a bunch of celestial Reverend Sisters
dressed in sparkling-white robes.

I was transported on a stretcher,
a beautiful Victorian piece like Queen Elizabeth's cart;
the celestial Reverend Sisters were leading me,
through an endless garden of rosy flowers, to a High Place,
or so I thought. Smoothly, the journey went on

against some celestial background sound,
music so Heavenly and hypnotising that I felt
helplessly light and soft like liquid foam.
Intermittently, I felt some unprecedented happiness,
apparently in expectation of the promised destination,
described as a Place Of Unrivalled Magnificence & Wonder.
But the very thought of my family left on Earth in helpless
state
dubbed my face with a thick coat of fright,
a countenance so obvious that one celestial Reverend Sister,
like that Reverend Sister in the theatre waiting room,
cast me such a pitiful look I was even more frightened.

Suddenly, I found myself a lone bat hanging in space
just above the floating ball of Earth,
looking down, as if heeding to a powerful voice
that seemed to have commanded me: "Look down there!"
The fright in me had completely vanished, and I hung there
contemplating on what was opening out before my eyes;
the earthen ball kept changing in shape and form as it floats.

Kaleidoscopically, and as if I watched a horror movie, the ball
swallowed up, in gluttonous malice, certain types creatures
and spat them out into other forms of creatures.
Hanging in that inter-space, like a strange bat
displayed on a National Museum,
I felt like a tiny branch ready to give way,
though still firmly glued to the lone tree
planted right in the middle of the earthen ball.

My interpretation, in that dreamy state, of the wondrous
display
was linked to evolution in science; my lonesome hanging
in space like bat & tiny tree branch, meant confirmation that

all men are one man blown into existence by the Supreme One from on High.

At that instant I must have dropped
from that inter-space on to the surface of the earthen mass,
for I could no longer see the roundness of the ball.

From then henceforth, I was surrounded by an intermingling
of twisted, elongated human-like figures—
some of this Earth, others apparently of the yonder world—
all in the single earthly space about me.

Possibly now fully aboard the floating Earth, I saw,
in a flash, the image of Eni, my wife, sitting by my side,
and I exclaimed loud but not near Earth enough to be heard
by earthly beings: “You are supposed to be a great woman.”

And then that of my boss, Bryan Curran, I saw
and exclaimed, loud and near Earth enough to be heard
by earthly beings: “Bryan is the symbol of conservation
in the whole wide world, the Universe.”

This stirred me up, and I felt fully on Earth at that instant,
and saw Eni, my wife, sitting beside me on my hospital bed,
dressed in lace-clothing, necklace & earring of gold,
looking more resplendent than ever before.

Eni, my better-half, had received the news in Yaounde,
and was chauffeur-driven by Bryan, my conservation boss;
so eaten by anxiety was she that she was in such a hurry
to see if I was alive or dead from the ugly road event.
But a week later she left for Yaounde, in painful regrets,
and I spent seventeen long, dreadful days,
in utter pain, in St. John of God Hospital, Nguti.
The pain persists until today, but I feel consoled
I was asked to postpone the end journey,
Spared to rejoin and build up my earthly family
and plan for a better and more prosperous life.

Double Standards

(Written 7 November 2010)

His gift was a red scorpion
And hers a gold accordion

Him you gave an aching bite
And her a dainty bike

Exposed daily was him to ridicule
As him she painted proud and radical

Her skills to gain you made her his intern
Your promise to fulfil you made him hers in turn

To her belonged all good work equipment
While his were simply shouts of indictment

Increased by you was his work day
Maintained was hers on increased pay

To her you gave promotion
For him to gain clear demotion

Quick to Bless

Be slow to spend
But quick to earn;
Slow to use
But quick to make;
Slow to sleep
But quick to wake;
Slow to rest
But quick to work;
Slow to blame
But quick to praise;
Slow to curse
But quick to bless.

For More Blessings

Take my hand
From valleys' depths
Raise me up
To mountains' heights
Grease my hands
And grace my house
Pour Thy showers
Over us.

Quick to Bless

Be slow to spend
But quick to earn;
Slow to use
But quick to make;
Slow to sleep
But quick to wake;
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Raise me up
To mountains' heights
Grease my hands
And grace my house
Pour Thy showers
Over us.

This collection of poems spans a wide range of themes and subjects, including culture, politics, socio-economics, environment, and human rights. The poems are a reflection of Ekpe Inyang's close contact with and passionate observation of society, as well as his generous sharing of life experiences and personal philosophy. Ekpe's poetic journey started in 1992, and some of the poems in this collection have been published in national and internal newspapers, magazines, anthologies, and journals.

“... a dense collection of poems that treat several issues in a multi-faceted manner. The poet employs sharp imagery, salient symbols and succinct metaphors, among other devices, to unearth the whirlwinds of his mind, calling on society's attention aloud, lest he explodes. Indeed, Ekpe Inyang's *Silent Voices* provokes sealed lips to venture sane discussions on the growth of mankind.”

MATHEW TAKWI, POET & PLAYWRIGHT

“Ekpe Inyang's *Silent Voices* are in fact not silent voices but eloquent and powerful voices blasting hate, prescribing love; combating oppression, recommending freedom; chastising extravagance, proposing modesty; and denouncing ugliness, and hailing beauty. This juxtaposition is a moving testimony of the poet's all embracing themes of human predicaments and hopes.”

**ALOBWED'EPIE, NOVELIST, POET, CRITIC AND PROFESSOR OF LITERATURE,
UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE 1**

A Chevening Scholar, EKPE INYANG hails from the Korup ethnic group and holds an MSc degree in Environmental Studies from the University of Strathclyde, UK. He is author of a number of scientific articles and textbooks in areas such as environmental studies, environmental education, and research methodology, and has distinguished himself as a committed playwright and poet. With eight full length plays to his credit, *Silent Voices* is his first collection of poems.



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